

Correctional Industrial Facility in Pendleton Pioneers Educational Program

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Joe Gossage,
PLUS program participant

PENDLETON, Ind. (NLI) - An educational program at the Correctional Industrial Facility in Pendleton is the first of its kind in Indiana.

One hundred inmates graduated Wednesday afternoon with family members looking on.

"We hope it's a life-changing experience," said Robert Schafer, chaplain at the facility.

There are two types of classes in the program: faith-based and character-based. Inmates must choose one specific course. Character classes can be applied to Spirituality options, but Spirituality classes can't be applied to Character options. Subjects explored include "Religious Diversity" and "Please Understand Me."

"It's a way in which they can confront who they were and try to re-invent themselves in a new mold," Schafer said.

That's the case for inmate Joe Gossage. He's already served more than 10 years.

"It helped me to better understand myself and the things that I was doing, and it taught me how to correct those and avoid them," Gossage said.

He said he would also like to share his experience with kids and try to keep them from ending up where he is.

Another exercise that's a part of the curriculum is for inmates to write a letter to themselves. Inmates also "apply" for a job by writing a letter.

"But also, they apply for the job of being a husband, being a father, of being a good citizen," Schafer explained.

Volunteer chaplain and program coordinator Joe Huff shared one thing that makes his job worthwhile: "When those guys come to me and say 'Hey, this has changed my life,' " he said.

The next semester starts Oct. 24th.

About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.

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